



**HRH Princess Reema bint
Bandar Al Saud: The Future
Is Promising For Saudi
Women**

**Open Letter – Vogue
Arabia – December 7, 2020**

Never has there been a more promising, more optimistic time to be a young woman in Saudi Arabia than right now. Barriers are being replaced by opportunity. Cultural limitations are giving way to social transformation. What we are now seeing in the Kingdom is a historic wakeup call – a long overdue realization that our economy cannot prosper or thrive if half our population is on the sidelines, unable to fully participate and contribute.

Change is now happening all around us and our collective journey will continue until Saudi women are so genuinely accepted in every job and sector that we never again have to call any Arab woman 'the first.'

Context matters, as each country's progress must take place in a manner and pace where change and reform become irrevocable. We have moved from a period between the 1960s and 1970s that was marked by a struggle for women's education, where female pioneers created schools, universities, and training programs to ensure that women were equipped with the ability to attain and obtain essential tools. The following decades marked the struggle for women in the workplace, where strong women challenged social norms and not only entered the job market but played key roles in the private and public sector. And now, consider Saudi Arabia today: Women are driving and traveling freely; they make up 60% of the nation's university graduates; the guardianship system has been dismantled and women have greater freedoms and independence; segregation in restaurants and public events has ended; women in Saudi enjoy equal pay, whether in public or private sector

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employment; and they are CEOs, bankers, soldiers, athletes, firefighters, and ambassadors.

These are profound, historic changes that many would have considered, even just a few years ago, all but unimaginable. And now it's happening. The glass ceiling inhibiting women's progress and advancement is cracking and with continued progress; it will soon melt away. Saudi Arabia's embrace of gender equity and women's empowerment, while the right thing to do, is a necessity. For our nation and economy to thrive, we must continue not only including but actively engaging women's ingenuity, innovation, and expertise.

Now, despite our recent achievements and accomplishments, we are nowhere near the end of this journey. While we've made progress, we're not there yet. But we can be. To overturn decades of systemic social, cultural, and economic inequity, it's not enough just for governments to implement new rules, regulations, and laws (which alone don't change behavior) – private sector attitudes and society's perceptions must change as well. We need a new mindset; one where building more equitable and tolerant societies is a collective ambition, a shared responsibility, and a common obligation of citizenship. And we need to do it for the right reasons, not as an ambition to "Westernize" but as an ambition to evolve and advance, while maintaining the traditions and beliefs of our beautiful and rich culture.

We should all do our part – the government, the private sector, community organizations, and the entirety of civil society. The glass ceiling overhead can be resistant and it will take all of us to break through. All of us working together to dismantle both the institutional structures and the social habits that inhibit women's opportunities and slow our upward mobility. It will take a commitment from every sector – but particularly the media that speaks to us every day. Publications like Vogue Arabia can play a monumental role by creating more opportunities for Arab women writers, photographers, art designers, and editors, as well as publishing more content on women entrepreneurs and gender advancement.

There is a future waiting where Arab women explore and engage the world on their own terms, enabling them to dream but, most importantly, to follow and implement their dreams. That future is closer than we think. A future defined by Arab women, rather than for Arab women. To young Saudi women, to whom much is now being offered, much will also be expected. We all stand on the shoulders of other women, who cleared the way and surmounted every obstacle imaginable so that those who came next could go further. What will the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia look like 30 or 50 years from now? That I do not know. But what I do know, is that whatever the future holds for the Kingdom, young Saudi women will be at the front of the line, integral to the

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process of shaping it. And that means, very soon, we will no longer refer to the 'first' Saudi woman this or the 'first' Saudi woman that – because the presence and contribution of Saudi women in every job, occupation, career, and sector will simply be commonplace and unremarkable. The time has come to be judged by our capabilities and accomplishments – and not by our gender."

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